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WHISKERETTA

MINA DEANE HALSEY
AUTHOR OF
A TENDERFOOT IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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Whiskeretta

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WHISKERETTA

BY

MINA DEANE HALSEY

AUTHOR OF

"A TENDERFOOT IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA"
"WHEN EAST COMES WEST"
"NEEDLES AND PINS"
ETC., ETC.

NEW YORK
PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR
BY
J. J. LITTLE & IVES CO.
1911

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This is an autograph edition of Whiskeretta, the number of this copy being 122

Nina Deane Halsey

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TO

MY BOY GENE

THIS SMALL VOLUME

IS DEDICATED

WHISKERETTA

OF course, his right name was Isaac, but when two men get well enough acquainted to go halves on a cheese sandwich, when only one measly nickel stands between 'em and starvation, they ain't very liable to waste much time on politeness, so I just naturally called him Ike.

Yes, sir—we've gone halves on many a sandwich, and on many a glass of beer, too, when we was just about busted. Of course, to be polite, Ike always wanted me to drink my half of the beer first—said he was brought up that way; consequently all I got out of it was the smell and a mouthful of wind.

Ike wouldn't let me blow off the foam—said it was wasting money—but if his stomach was as chuck full of gas as mine was, after I got all that was coming to me, he wouldn't have been so thundering stingy on the beer question.

Ike was all right enough, I guess—straight as a string and all that, but he had bristles on him just the same. I never saw 'em, of course, but there was a good deal of pig about Ike—razor-back breed, for he only weighed 105 pounds, including his whiskers. Yes, sir, the only thing generous about Ike was his whiskers. He'd been deformed with 'em for twenty years, and they were still growing.

First time I got a view of 'em they reminded me of a waterfall, and Ike was so skinny he looked like he was hiding behind 'em all the time. They reached clear down to his knees,

and spread out to his armpits, and once when the "Seventy Northerland Brothers" were in town I heard that one of 'em nearly went dippy trying to figure out how he could work Ike into the business.

He begged him to be an uncle to the whole bunch, and help bald-headed humanity—offered to put him on the road at a good salary if he'd just let women run their fingers through his whiskers, as an inducement to buy a bottle of their hair tonic.

But Ike was shy—any woman that undertook to run her fingers through his whiskers in those days would think she had struck a hornet's nest, with a boarder in every room.

Another funny thing about Ike. He didn't like women worth a cent—no, sir; he was married to his whiskers and he was actually a poor man on account of 'em, for he couldn't find a

job that seemed to agree with 'em to save his life. They had never brought him anything but trouble, since he'd had 'em.

He told me years ago when women took to wearing the biggest bustles their husbands could pay for, some relation of his begged him to get a clean shave so she could use the hair to make her bustle bigger than her next door neighbor's.

Not by a jug full!

He said he told her to buy a bale of hay or any other darned thing she had a mind to, but he'd see her in Mrs. Jarley's Wax Works before he'd part with his whiskers. Then she tried to work him on the charity dodge. The church was making pin cushions to sell for the benefit of the widows and orphans. Wouldn't he part with 'em for charity?

Not so you'd notice it!

Next, the More Oyster Mattress people got wind of Ike's wonderful collection of whiskers, and tried to get a corner on 'em to use for their "lame back" customers. I heard they offered him an interest in the business, but still Ike wouldn't let go. Said he'd be lonesome if he couldn't hear the wind whistle through 'em—said those whiskers made a chest protector in winter that had the chamois skin kind whipped to death—said he'd have pneumonia or pluerisy—maybe both—inside of ten minutes if he went out doors without 'em—said he'd saved hundreds of dollars on neckties and clean shirts since he'd worn 'em.

Oh, Ike was mighty economical, Ike was. You couldn't lose Ike on saving if you stayed up all night. Ike never wasted a cent—said he was brought up that way.

Sometimes when I saw how awful stingy Ike

was it seemed to me it would be a whole lot cheaper for him to die.

Well, anyway, when women began to wear "rats" in their bangs I sure did feel sorry for Ike. He certainly lost flesh keeping his eye on those whiskers of his. One or two women proposed to him—he knew it wasn't for love, but for his whiskers. He was pretty good looking with his hat on, but when he took it off, he was so bald-headed he looked half undressed.

Always looked like the moths had got in and buckled down to business, while Ike was out hunting for moth balls in a country drug store. While he was awful proud of his whiskers, he was mighty sensitive about his bald head. They tell a good story on Ike and his bald head, and I'll tell it to you.

A good many years ago Ike was fortunate enough to have on hand a little filthy lucre that

needed touching up, and some one told him that a sight-seeing trip to California would touch up any spare lucre he might find laying around loose in his jeans so forcibly that he never would be troubled with round shoulders carting it over the country. So Ike went on a rubbering trip to the land of gold.

One of the first sights he took in was an ostrich farm. The fellow Ike traveled around with in those days didn't have such a flourishing corn crop on his feet as Ike did, so he could cover a lot of ground, without feeling life was a failure, especially if you had a standing-up job.

So Ike told him to take his time looking around while he sat down and rested under one of the big trees; but before five minutes had passed he stretched himself out, and went sound asleep.

When the other fellow showed up he couldn't find Ike anywhere. He saw a pair of boots under the tree that somehow reminded him of Ike, but there was a hen ostrich camping right side of 'em, and, of course, he didn't feel like interfering with her family affairs. But after a while he "shooed" her off, and there was Ike, his bald head as red as a beet, and the perspiration just rolling down his face.

Goodness knows how long that ostrich had been sitting on Ike's bald head, thinking it was an ostrich egg, and the Lord knows what she would have hatched out if she'd only had a little more time.

As the fashion for false hair continued to spread among the women folks, Ike rapidly dwindled down in flesh, until he was almost skin and bones—mostly bones, but still his whiskers kept on growing.

He trimmed 'em once a week, but it only seemed to give 'em a fresh start, and they shot out like string beans under a summer sun. He had 'em singed, but it only seemed to strengthen 'em, and they fairly yelled with delight at being able to show him what a dandy muscle they had. Then Ike tried braiding 'em nights until some woman told him it only made 'em grow all the faster. Then he rolled 'em up on a wad of paper that curled 'em so beautifully, he couldn't see whether he was walking on the sidewalk or out in the middle of the road.

He swore every woman he met on the street winked at him, or, rather, at his whiskers.

One day he hit on a scheme he thought would put an end to all his troubles. The next time a female rolled her eyes at him he bolted into a hallway, and shoved the whole bunch of

'em inside his undervest. All went well for about thirty seconds, and then something happened. I didn't find out just what it was until Ike got out of jail. A policeman told me the trouble began by Ike throwing a back-action fit, and then going into convulsions before he could tell 'em what was the matter with him. But Ike told me afterward that every one of those whiskers began to tickle him at the same time, and they all got down to business so quick he couldn't catch his breath to save his life. He said the more he twisted and squirmed the more they tickled, and before he could pull 'em out, a cop pinched him and run him in for a crazy. By the time they landed him in jail all the lights had gone out for him. But when they undressed him and hauled out a basketful of whiskers he began to come back to life.

He was a couple of weeks getting over his troubles, and he found on measuring his whiskers they had grown six inches. This made him mighty blue—in fact, Ike's blues were so blue they were black.

So one day I told him I thought with such a wonderful growth of whiskers as he had been deformed with all these years, they ought to be made to pay their board and room, to say nothing of their car fare. I told him to get some kind of dope with a long name to it, paste his picture on the front of the bottle and sit back and count his money. He grabbed at it like a matinee girl reaches for an ice-cream soda, and he told me he'd pay me big for my bright idea. Said he had always been free-hearted ever since he was a child, when he willingly gave the core of his apple to the biggest boy at school.

Yes, I remember—the biggest boy whaled him once, and Ike was generous with anything he didn't want after that. Oh, Ike had little fuzzy bristles on him even when he was a kid; I'm dead sure of that!

All the while, that bright idea of mine had been traveling some in Ike's mind. He prevailed on me to go uptown with him right away and rent a room, so he could begin counting his money. He hated to go alone—said sometimes it seemed as if his whiskers pulled so hard, it made him tongue-tied, and he realized he was a mighty poor talker. Said if I'd go into the business with him, do the talking, and furnish the money to open up, he'd furnish the whiskers and the face to advertise it.

I bit—and after dickering with half a dozen landlords, we finally rented a cheap room, and opened up for business, with a second-hand

three-legged table and a cane-bottom chair that had exploded in the seat, leaving only a hole with a fringe of straw around the edge, that was an awful teaser for the wind when it felt playful.

Of course, Ike drew the chair!

He pointed out to me that he was the whole thing, for without his whiskers the business couldn't run.

Sure! I had already begun to see what I was up against. Yes, Ike he drew the chair, hole and all, and I drew all that was left—the table. Of course I could have sat on it if it hadn't been a cripple, but I saved money buying it, so I couldn't very well kick on my own business deal. I had to furnish the money, and furnish the office, and I ain't rolling in long green—not by a jug full!

Ike spotted a map of the United States in the second-hand store that was so old it had crawled away and died. Yes, sir, I'll bet that map was printed a couple of years after Columbus discovered America. And then he spotted a spittoon, with a hole in the side of it, that I'll bet came over on the ship with that Columbus bunch. The map was a quarter and the spittoon was ten cents, and Ike wanted 'em both—said they'd show up dandy in the office. As Ike chewed tobacco from morning till night, I could see where that spittoon would pay for itself in a week, but I balked at the map. Ike threatened to let me out of the business if I didn't buy it—showed me how we could point out to our customers, just where in the United States our biggest factories were located. Ike was getting to be a regular bunco-steerer, even before we opened up the fake

joint. I gave in, for if Ike got mad and took his whiskers and went home, there I'd be with all that office furniture on my hands, and no whiskers to continue the business. Oh, he had me all right, and he was mighty wise to the fact.

So I bought the map and the spittoon and told Ike to go ahead and enjoy himself. He got busy just as soon as we reached the office, and he chewed and chewed till it looked like to me he'd dislocate his jaw bones. He squirted most of the juice through the hole we'd just bought, but I told him never mind—not to be discouraged—to keep on and try to hit the rim, so any one that came in would think we'd had a lot of customers and were doing a rushing business.

Then Ike he wrote a sign, on a big piece of cardboard, saying:

WHISKERETTA

CLOSED TO-DAY,

BUSINESS MEETING OF THE COMPANY

and pinned it on the outside of the door—then we both tore up a lot of paper and threw it on the floor, and Ike he spit as often as he could make juice, and it wasn't long before we began to think we were doing a land-office business.

We got hold of a job lot of "seconds" in six-ounce bottles, and had some labels printed that showed Ike and his whiskers full length, and for a fact, after we got the dope bottled up, if I hadn't known what was in it, I'd bought a bottle of it myself—it *sure* looked honest to a stranger!

We took plain city water for the foundation, and beet juice for the coloring. I insisted on putting in a little alcohol to pre-

serve the stuff, and Ike settled on wintergreen for the smell. It sure was cheap, but it *had* to be, or it could never see the light of day. The entire bank account of the President and Treasurer amounted to $6.98—and $6.00 of that we borrowed from the janitor. We nailed him the minute we rented the room, and honest, we almost had to take it away from him. He didn't like our looks, somehow, but Ike talked to him like a father, and showed him how rich he'd be inside of a month, and after a hard struggle, Ike got all he had. To tell the truth, I felt sorry for him, for there were tears in his eyes when Ike took the money away from him, but Ike saw great possibilities in that $6.00, and he would have *chloroformed* him if he couldn't have got it any other way. So after paying $1.98 for the bottles and $5.00 for an ad. in the daily paper, we

mixed the dope, shook it up, sat down and waited.

But I haven't told you the name of it!

Ike called it Whiskeretta—named it for his whiskers and the first girl he ever had. Ike thought a powerful lot of Etta, and way back in courting days, he named everything he ever had, dead or alive, after Etta. Named his horse after her, and an old moth-eaten tomcat that every one in the village had taken a shot at—yes, sir, he named 'em all after Etta. He always told her some day he was going out West to make his fortune, and when he did, he'd name the biggest thing that belonged to him after her.

So when this opportunity presented itself his whiskers being the biggest part of him, and also being a man of his word, he named this wonderful discovery Whiskeretta, so that Etta

in years to come could point out with pride this famous hair grower to her future generations; and if Whiskeretta had taken with the public as we expected it to, it would sure have kept Etta busy pointing—as the last time I saw Etta, she weighed over 300 pounds, had 14 children and 21 grandchildren.

Under the circumstances, Ike certainly was a lucky man when he came West. Better to be out West busted than back East overloaded.

Well, the next morning we got down to the office of the Whiskeretta Company just about daylight, for fear we'd miss somebody. Hour after hour went by and nothing happened, except an occasional squirt of tobacco juice into the Company spittoon.

It was so quiet in the Whiskeretta office that a deaf and dumb asylum was as noisy as a circus compared to it. As usual, Ike was in

the President's seat, and the Treasurer was in *his* usual seat—the seat of his pants, gol darn it, the only seat that was mine around that office—and I asked Ike if we didn't appear to be wasting time.

Asked him if he knew how to play tiddle-de-winks, or button, button, who's got the button while we were waiting for the crowd to rush in, when suddenly a shadow loomed up against the glass in the door. It stopped a minute, long enough to read Ike's cardboard sign, then went on down the hall.

I looked at Ike, and saw his bald head was covered with beads of perspiration, and he was biting his finger nails like he was starving to death.

I jammed his hat over his bald head, for if any intending customer got sight of that shining surface, Whiskeretta Hair Tonic would

be queered before it even had a chance to peep.

Once more the shadow showed up on the glass, and I had all I could do to hold Ike. We clinched, but he beat me to the door, and opening it, called out:

"Hey, are you looking for any one in particular?"

Ike's hat had fallen off in the scuffle.

"Well, I don't know as it's any of your business if I am," snapped a dyspeptic-looking man, with a face the color of an overripe cucumber. His head was second cousin to a billard ball, and he didn't have an eyebrow to his name.

"Well, by the looks of that bald head of yours, my friend, I can give you a pointer that will tickle your ribs so you won't be able to get your face together for a week. Every woman you meet will want you for her own,

and if you're married, you'll have to hang out a sign 'Taken' to avoid the rush."

"*Is that so?*" sneered the newcomer. "Why don't you hypnotize your own head, and see what happens. Looks to me like you need *hair* about as much as anything I've ever run across."

But Ike was game.

He trotted out his whiskers, and you could have knocked the man's eyes off with a stick.

"For the love of Mike," he gasped, "*Where* did you get those whiskers?"

"These," began Ike, stroking them lovingly, "*these* are the result of using Whiskeretta." Ike kept running his fingers through the glossy hair, and rolling his eyes at the astonished stranger.

"Wall, I swan!" said the man. "Gimme a dozen bottles!"

"Not so fast, not so fast," returned Ike, airily waving him aside. "This ain't any of your *cheap* stuff, my friend. This marvelous hair tonic is worth its weight in gold, and will cost you $5 a bottle. Now—er——"

"I don't care if it's $50 a bottle—*gimme six of 'em!* I've got plenty of money and no hair, and by the looks of you, I should judge you've got plenty of whiskers and no money."

He must have been a mind reader!

Well, Ike just about broke his neck getting back into the office to wrap up those six bottles of Whiskeretta, and his hands shook so tying up the bundle that he rattled another leg off of our office table.

After he'd closed his fist over that $30.00 and had given the poor devil his package of gold bricks, I was in hopes the man would

light out, for Ike looked like he was going to throw one of his old-time fits.

When he finally *did* tear himself away he hollered back at Ike:

"Say, friend, take my advice, and go soak your own head in Whiskeretta, or carry on the business by correspondence, for that 'shiner' of yours has got a billiard ball going some."

But he couldn't hurt Ike's feelings—not after leaving $30 in the treasury of the Whiskeretta Company.

After we got strength enough to get back into the office, being treasurer, I argued I ought to hold all the money we took in, but right there Ike's bristles began to sprout again, and he couldn't see it my way, even with his glasses on.

He claimed I was just a figurehead in the

business, anyway, for without him and his whiskers there *wasn't* any business.

Sure! One and one makes two—I can count!

While Ike was still blowing off steam, some one knocked on the door. We both made a run for it, and found a female standing there that looked like a package of dried apples that had been given away with a box of prunes.

The sunburned wig she was carrying around was three sizes too big for her, and turned the tops of her ears over, like a man's hat on a three-year-old kid.

As usual, Ike's whiskers completely filled the doorway.

"Oh," she gasped, raising both hands, and falling back in astonishment, "you are the man —the *blessed* man, whose picture adorns the

Morning Trumpeter. You are my heart's ideal, my mental picture of the perfect man!"

She was looking at his whiskers—for you can't really see Ike himself, excepting side view. She never even *saw* me—but she didn't look good to me, anyway, so I didn't feel like I'd missed anything.

Ike cleared his throat.

"I am the originator of Whiskeretta, the magic tonic that grew these whiskers. Step right up and feel of 'em," he added, throwing out all the chest he had.

She *did* feel of 'em—she mussed 'em up and played peek-a-boo with 'em, until Ike began to squirm.

"I want a bottle," she cooed—"not for myself—mercy, no!—but for my aunt. You can see for yourself I have plenty of hair."

"I *do* see," said Ike, getting a side view of where the wig had missed connections.

I went in and wrapped up a bottle of the stuff and Ike said:

"Five dollars, madam," without turning a whisker.

The old girl was stung all right, but she got upon her feet like a thoroughbred.

"Haven't—haven't you any *sample* bottles, Mr. Whiskeretta?"

"Why, madam," Ike returned, his voice trembling, and chuck full of tears, "every drop of this marvelous tonic is worth twice its weight in gold. It's even more precious than Radium, and will cost $10 a bottle inside of two weeks. It is only to introduce it on this side of the water that you are able to buy it to-day at this extremely low price, madam."

Honest, I never dreamed Ike would turn

out to be such a natural-born fakir. I knew well enough he was a natural-born liar, but I never thought he'd turn out such a convincing one.

Still, we needed the money if we had to steal it. The beets we made the juice of hadn't been paid for yet.

On the strength of Ike's flowery speech his victim bought two bottles and meekly handed out a $10 bill that looked good enough to eat.

Ike was fast getting to that stage of the game when he unconsciously threw back one side of his coat and strutted around with his hands in his pockets. With that $40 in his pocket, maybe he was wise in keeping his hands on it, after all, for he knew I was hungry as a dog and flat busted. Yes, sir, the only thing I had in my hand-me-downs was the re-

ccipt for that three-legged table and the spittoon.

The postman stopped with a letter for the Whiskeretta Company.

Ike was in such a rush to open it he chewed the end off. He thought he smelt money, *but it was only a bill for the beets.*

Business lagged for a few days. Two or three men sneaked up to the door and knocked, and on finding the dope would cost 'em $5 a bottle, made some excuse and tried to get away.

But not a single one of 'em got away—not without they took a bottle of Whiskeretta along with 'em. Ike cut the price of it all to pieces. Some of 'em got it for a $1 a bottle; some for 50 cents, and one man got a bottle in trade for a "Don't-Worry" button. The last man only had 10 cents, but he got his bottle

just the same; Ike hated to disappoint him, and it was 8 cents profit, anyway.

In the course of ten days we began to get a good many letters. The first one that came was addressed—

TO THE PRESIDENT

of

WHISKERETTA.

I knew, of course, being only the COMPANY part of the business, it didn't belong to me, so I let Ike open his own mail. I saw him get white around the gills, and as he handed it over for me to read, he said:

"Some d—— fool trying to be funny!"

This is what it said:

DEAR SIR:

I purchased a bottle of your hair tonic, and accidentally dropped it on the sidewalk. None of it run out, however, and on opening the package when I reached home, to my astonishment, I found a beautiful muff of long, silky black hair, that would have cost me $15 at least, in any store in town. Many thanks.

MARY DOOLITTLE.

I looked at Ike. He was chewing tobacco and sawing wood at the same time.

The postman brought in a few more letters, which we proceeded to open. The first one began:

THE WHISKERETTA COMPANY:

DEAR SIRS—I brought home a bottle of your hair tonic to use on my bald head. My wife advised me to try it on the dog first, as we have, or, rather, *did* have, a Mexican hairless dog. I did so, and yesterday he took the

blue ribbon at a dog show given by our Village Improvement Society for being the finest specimen of Angora dog ever brought over from Angoria.

Yours truly,
P. D. QUICKWORK.

Ike was getting warm around the collar—in fact, he had taken it off altogether, while I'd been reading that last letter.

"'Nother d—— fool that thinks he's smart," he snorted. "Fire away, Smith, I can stand anything now, so read the whole bunch of 'em."

At times Ike's language isn't as ladylike as it might be! The next one was short and simple. It read:

GENTS:

My wife bought a bottle of your wonderful hair tonic. She carelessly let a few drops run

down into her eyebrows, and now she has to braid them, so she can see to do the housework.

Resp't,

P. BEAN.

"Come again," said Ike, as he began walking back and forth, squirting tobacco juice in every corner of the room, and kicking the Company spittoon under the table.

I was there with the real goods.

The next letter began:

MY DEAR FRIEND:

A day or two ago I bought a bottle of Whiskeretta for my mother-in-law. She has been losing hair rapidly, and so have I. Some of it run down on her chin, and now she either has to shave every day or get a job in a dime museum as a bearded lady. She hasn't visited us since, for which please accept my sincere thanks.

Yours Resp't,

WILL W. UPP.

"Well, wouldn't that come and git you!" bellowed Ike. "*What in thunder*——"

"Listen, Ike," I answered. "Here's one that'll curl your whiskers:"

To The Whiskeretta Company:

Gentlemen: I want to write you what Whiskeretta has done for me. I have used your magic hair tonic for only two days, and now the barber has to cut my hair with the lawn mower, for which, by the way, he charges me extra. I put a few drops of Whiskeretta on some backward tomato plants, and the vines grew so fast they dragged the tomatoes all over the back yard, and for all I built a high board fence to keep them inside the yard, the last I saw of them they were climbing over the fence and making off down the road to the canning factory.

There was little left in the bottle, so I rubbed it on the fence, and we will be able to gather two or three crops of curled hair off of this

fence every season. Your discovery is a God-send to humanity. Ship me a case of it. In opening the bottle we spilt some of it on the oilcloth in the bathroom, and when we went in there the next morning we found a 3 x 6 black fur rug that would be a bargain at $12 in any furniture store in town.

What will you take for the business?

Yours truly,

I. M. A. HUSTLER.

"Keep Hustler's address," said Ike, his voice so weak I could barely understand him.

He was sitting humped up in the Company chair, a good-sized portion of him coming out of the hole in the seat. Ike had shrunk up something awful in the last half hour. Being as thin as a rail to start with, I wouldn't have been a bit surprised to have seen him double up like a jackknife and go down clean through the hole onto the floor.

"Can you beat it?" he whispered, rolling his eyes at me like a man on shipboard who hates to let go of a full course dinner.

"Surest thing you know," I returned. "Hold on to the chair, Ike, for this one's a 'solar plexus.' "

To the Whiskeretta Company:

My wife bought a bottle of your wonderful hair tonic, and yesterday the baby got hold of it and swallowed a few drops. He went into convulsions, and the doctor found it had gone down his windpipe, and the hair was coming in so fast he was choking to death. After nearly killing the baby, he managed to get it out, and although we realize what a wonderful hair grower Whiskeretta really is, we threw it away, as it was too dangerous to have around with young children in the house. Do you suppose it would have the same effect on a grown-up? My mother-in-law has been with us a year now,

and I'm a man who knows when he's had enough.

P. S.—We saw a beautiful weeping willow tree in our back yard this morning, and to our surprise, found it was our old garbage bucket before we threw the bottle of Whiskeretta into it. We have named it the "*Whiskeretta Tree,*" and as we needed shade in our back yard, and didn't want to wait so many years for a tree to grow, you can imagine how happy we are over it.

P. S., P. S.—OUR DOG IS DEAD! He swallowed a seed that fell off the "Whiskeretta Tree" to-day, and the new hairs in his stomach tickled him to death.

I'm going to tell my mother-in-law the seeds are fine for indigestion.

Will report full particulars later.

With best regards,

Yours truly,

I. B. HENPECKED.

Ike grabbed his hat and made a run for the door, and he never came back to the office of the Whiskeretta Company. In fact, I never saw Isaac again. I heard afterward he sold out the business to Hustler for $10,000, and after getting a clean shave, went down into Mexico and started a rubber plantation.

The janitor attached the furniture of the company for the $6 we owed him, and the original Whiskeretta Company went out of business. Sometimes I'd swear it was a pipe dream if I didn't still hold the receipt for the three-legged table and the beets.

THE END.

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